

Dear Neighbor,

As the Legislature addresses the numerous challenges facing our state and nation, it is extremely important that all citizens participate in the process.

State government and the actions of the Legislature **directly affect you, your family and our community**. Whenever you have an opinion, a problem, a question, or an idea, I hope you will take the time to share it with me.

Your interest and involvement is tremendously valuable. It's very important for me to know what's on your mind. Hearing from the people in my district is the only way I can provide the best possible representation for our area.

I am pleased to be able to provide this pamphlet to you regarding how to effectively participate in the legislative process. In addition, I've included "Nine Aids to Writing Legislators" tips on the most effective way to write a legislator.

I hope this information is helpful and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



**Doug Ericksen**  
State Representative



## THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

We choose representatives to carry out the difficult task of determining what kind of laws and policies will best serve our interests.

The objective of the legislature is to reach a consensus on a wide range of issues affecting every citizen and the future prosperity of Washington state. It is a process that involves cooperation to make critical decisions in everyone's best interest.

To effectively perform their job, legislators rely heavily on input from a wide variety of different sources.

I receive a great deal of technical information from my staff, state agency personnel and professional lobbyists. **Yet, much of what I actually decide depends on the views, interests and preferences of the citizens who elect me.**

This is precisely how the legislative process was designed to work best. It is based on a close, open and positive relationship between elected officials and the citizens whom they represent.

*"It is not the fact of liberty,  
but the way in which liberty  
is exercised that ultimately  
determines whether  
liberty itself survives."*

— Dorothy Thompson

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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# A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can actively participate in the legislative process in a variety of ways. Select the method that allows the fullest expression of your personal interest and commitment, but follow some basic steps.

## Know how the process works

In order to see the way your individual participation can be most effective, a basic understanding of the whole legislative picture is essential.

If there is something you do not understand about the process, call my office. I'll be happy to answer your questions.

## Make yourself the expert

Before you address an issue, do some homework. Know the whole issue: who it affects, what others feel about it, how it will influence future trends, and any other information you are able to gather. Thorough research allows you to present your viewpoint with confidence and credibility, and combined with your personal experience, is the most effective information you can provide.

## Get to know your representatives

To make a difference in the legislative process, you must develop a relationship with your representatives. Keep in mind that you can work effectively with someone, regardless of the personal views either of you may hold. While you are unlikely to agree on every issue, you can still build a positive and lasting relationship in the long run.

### Personal visit . . .

Call my office, introduce yourself, tell me what you would like to discuss and make an appointment for a visit.

### Write a letter . . .

Express your views and request my attention to a matter of concern through the mail. Make your letters brief, to the point, and clear. Include your mailing address and phone number so I know where to respond.

### Call the toll-free hotline . . .

During the session, you can call the toll-free legislative hotline (1-800-562-6000) to leave a message on any issue.

*“There is but one element of government, and that is THE PEOPLE. From this springs all government.”*  
— John Adams

If you plan a visit, know what you want to say, be factual and make your comments as brief and specific as you can. If there is something you do not know, be willing to admit it and offer to follow up with more information later (also an avenue for further discussion).

The best way to get to know your legislators on a personal basis is to spend time with them when the Legislature is not meeting. Arrange a meeting during the months between sessions when I am at home.

## Get to know legislative staff

Legislators rely heavily on their professional staff members for information gathering and analysis. You can play an equally supportive role by making sure staff is aware of the perspective your personal knowledge and experience can provide.

Legislative staff members face an incredible amount and variety of issues which they are supposed to understand. They always appreciate new sources of clear and accurate information and they are usually willing to return the favor.

## Network with other citizens

Much of the information you need to be effective in the legislative process can be obtained from other concerned and active citizens. Most interest areas are represented by informal citizen groups, if not formal membership organizations.

Find out whether there are groups that share your concerns and establish a network. A group of concerned citizens can be much more effective working together, rather than as separate individuals trying to accomplish the same goal.

# KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

Regardless of how frequently you contact your representatives, you will be far more effective following these points:

- 1 Be well prepared for your discussions.
- 2 Provide a written statement with all verbal presentations.
- 3 Make letters specific and concise.

Whatever position you represent, however, remember your participation makes a difference.

Our legislative process is one way each of us may contribute to the quality of life we experience in our state. Your willingness to be a responsible, involved participant is crucial to the decision-making process.

# NINE AIDS TO WRITING LEGISLATORS

- 1 Write on your personal or business letterhead, if possible, and sign your name over your typed signature at the end of the message.
- 2 Be sure your exact return address is on the letter, not just the envelope. Envelopes sometimes get thrown away before the letter is answered.
- 3 Identify your subject clearly. State the name of the legislation you are writing about. Give the House or Senate bill number if you know it.
- 4 State your reason for writing. Your own personal experience is your best support in evidence. Explain how the issue would affect you, or your family, business or profession, or what affect it could have on your community.
- 5 Avoid stereotyped phrases and sentences that give the appearance of “form” letters. They tend to identify your message as part of an organized pressure campaign and produce little or no impact.
- 6 Be reasonable. Don't ask for the impossible. Don't threaten. Don't say, “I'll never vote for you unless you do such and such.” That will not help your cause. It may even harm it.
- 7 Ask your legislator to state his position on the issue in his reply. As a constituent, you are entitled to know.
- 8 Consider the factor of timing. Try to write your position on a bill while it is in committee. Your senators and representatives can usually be more responsive to your appeal at that time rather than later on when the bill has already been approved by committee. Of course, that is not always the case. Sometimes your legislator may reserve judgment and her vote until the sentiment of her constituency has crystallized.
- 9 Thank your legislator if he pleases you with his vote on an issue. Everybody appreciates a complimentary letter and remembers it. On the other hand, if his vote is contrary to your position, don't hesitate to let him know. Your legislator will remember that too.

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